

CANONISATION UNDER THE CURRENT REGIME

Pope Francis's impending canonisation of Pope Paul VI moved English Catholic commentator, Fr John Hunwicke, to offer his thoughts on the question whether a declaration of canonisation always involves a pope in an infallible act, in comments on his website on 2nd and 3rd October.¹ Now, of course, the deed has been done. Pope Francis canonised Paul VI on 14th October.

The topic is a compelling one in an era where the feeling among Catholics is that canonisation has been devalued, degraded to the level of a means for promoting other agenda. Significant contributions on the question have been made by John R T Lamont on the *Rorate Caeli* website in the paper "The Authority of Canonisations"², on 24th August 2018, and by Peter Kwasniewski on 12th October on *One Peter Five*, "Why We Need Not (And Should Not) Call Paul VI 'Saint'"³.

The Vatican Council in *Pastor Aeternus* teaches that the pope has full and supreme power of jurisdiction not only in things which pertain to faith and morals but also in those which pertain to the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world. (DS 3060) The Council teaches that "when carrying out the duty of pastor and teacher of all Christians in accordance with his supreme apostolic authority [the pope] explains a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the universal Church" he speaks infallibly. (DS 3074-5) The Council *does not* extend that charism to acts or words of the pope which pertain to the discipline and government of the Church.

A papal declaration of canonisation does not, *save per accidens*, involve an issue of faith or morals. For instance, that Pope John XXIII is a saint is irrelevant to one's membership of Christ's Church or to his salvation. Fr Hunwicke quotes St Thomas as saying that it is a *medium inter res fidei et particulares*. It seems, then, to fall between the category of faith and that pertaining to discipline and government. While the veneration shown the saints is "to a certain extent a confession of the faith (an essential element of which is) that we believe in the glory of the saints" (*Quodlibet*. ix, 16) this does not bind the faithful to accept that a pope always speaks infallibly in declaring a particular person a saint. A caveat, however, must be sounded. In some cases the Church's acknowledgement of the sanctity of a person is intimately connected with the faith, for instance that of Sts Peter and Paul.

The assertion that a declaration of canonisation is always an infallible act is a theological opinion. It is said by Ludwig Ott to be *sententia certa*, a certain opinion.⁴ Yet it has no greater force, at this stage in the Church's development, than that of opinion. One cannot appeal to that part of *Pastor Aeternus* which deals with the Pope's jurisdiction in faith and morals to enhance the level of its authority.

¹ <http://liturgicalnotes.blogspot.com/>

² <https://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2018/08/the-authority-of-canonisations-do-all.html#more>

³ <https://onepeterfive.com/paul-vi-not-saint/>

⁴ *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, Dublin, 1955, p. 299

The infallibility or otherwise of a pope's declaration in respect of a recent canonisation may only become clear with time as the faithful test the declaration by the unanimity, or lack of it, with which they embrace its terms. The *sensus fidelium* is defined in the CCC as "the supernatural appreciation of faith on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals" (canon 92)⁵. A pope's declaration of canonisation, while it does not involve a matter of faith, yet touches the faith in asserting that the candidate has lived out the faith's demands heroically and has conformed his words and actions rigorously to the Church's teachings. Where misgivings are expressed among the faithful that the candidate has failed in one or the other, I suggest that a later pope may reconsider the evidence relied upon to support the declaration of canonisation and, if satisfied that there are sound reasons for doing so, remove the name of its subject from the canon.

Fr Hunwicke quotes Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758), Prospero Cardinal Lambertini, for what is contained in his text *De Beatificatione et Canonizatione*. This was written before his election to the papacy and it must be insisted that its authority is not that of a papal pronouncement but of a theologian, albeit an eminent one.

Fr Hunwicke says "It is in logic obvious that a proposition may be true, and may be demonstrably true, without it being incumbent upon anybody to *accept* that truth." This is problematic. A proposition which is demonstrably true may not logically be rejected since demonstration *eo ipso* involves certain proof. That is, one who understands the premises is bound by the rules of Logic to accept the truth of the conclusion. It is otherwise with a conclusion flowing from *inductive* reasoning. This always derives from evidence and the certainty of the conclusion depends on the evidential sufficiency. One does not have to go far to assess the evidence grounding papal declarations in respect of certain canonisations in the last forty years as far from conclusive, if not as to the heroicity of its subject as to the rigour of his adherence to Church teachings.

There is a mentality abroad that, though the evidence may be inadequate to justify it, a pope's declaration that a person is a saint must be infallible because the Almighty would not permit him to err. This reflects thinking advanced in support of the often ambivalent declarations of the bishops of Vatican II. It mattered not, it was argued, that what they said was open to criticism or that their conduct at the Council was frequently outrageous, or lacking in charity, their determinations could not be in error since the Holy Spirit guaranteed them. The reasoning, in each case, is presumptuous and naïve. In the case of Vatican II it is premised on the assumption that the Council was a General or Ecumenical Council. The oft repeated claim that it awaits the Church's formal confirmation, *pace* the view expressed by Cardinal Ratzinger referred to hereafter.

⁵ The canon reflects the aphorism of St Vincent of Lerins that that is within the Tradition of the Church which is believed everywhere, always and by everyone—*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*.

I disagree with Fr Hunwicke that *Pastor Aeternus* altered the meaning of the term 'infallible'. Cardinal Journet says of it: "[B]efore the definition it was of divine faith that the Pope could oblige the faithful to receive certain teachings as absolute and irrevocable. After the definition, it is... of divine faith that if the Pope can oblige the faithful to receive teachings as absolute and irrevocable this is because they are proposed by an infallible authority. The Pope's power was not increased by the definition, it was more explicitly promulgated."⁶

In his *Commentary* published on the occasion of the promulgation of Pope John Paul II's *Motu Proprio Ad Tuendam Fidem* in 1998, the head of the CDF, Cardinal Ratzinger, listed truths which, while not able to be declared as divinely revealed, are connected to revelation by historical necessity and therefore to be held definitively by those formally professing the faith. Among the instances he cited were the canonisations of saints and the celebration of an ecumenical council.

In listing canonisations in this category he ignored the reasoned opposition to the imposition of such a burden advanced by Cardinal Lambertini to which Fr Hunwicke has referred. It must be doubted whether the Church will ever impose the burden on the faithful in respect of candidates whose elevation is not intimately involved in some aspect of truths to be held *de fide*. St Augustine remarks that heresy assists in the development of understanding of the faith by causing the Church to refine it. Similarly, it seems, Pope Francis's conduct is assisting in the refinement of theological opinion on canonisations.

In listing "the celebration of" an ecumenical council Cardinal Ratzinger was, of course, referring to the Second Vatican Council. In respect of the previous twenty councils the Church, entertaining no doubts that they were true councils, adopts what they taught unreservedly. Vatican II's determinations, in contrast, frequently departed from what the Church taught. Listing "the celebration" of that council begs the question whether it was an ecumenical council at all. It implies, moreover, that it is enough for a pope to label a council 'ecumenical' for the faithful to be bound to accept it was, a striking example of the influence of the philosophical evil of subjectivism in the thinking of Church officials.

Fr Hunwicke asks rhetorically whether a dicasterial 'commentary' such as this of Cardinal Ratzinger could be deemed to be that judgement of the Apostolic See which Cardinal Lambertini saw as necessary to settle the question that canonizations are to be held definitively. The answer is 'No'. An issue on which theologians are so divided needs to be addressed specifically and the arguments pro and con considered *in extenso* before the Church gives a definitive answer which must be confirmed by the Sovereign Pontiff.

Michael Baker

15th October, 2018—*St Teresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church*

⁶ *The Church of the Word Incarnate*, London, 1955, p. 445